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Two
WESTERN ADVENTURERS

ALEXANDER HENRY AND PETER POND

By LAWRENCE BURPEE, F.R.S.C.

*Author of "Search for the Western Sea," "On the
Old Athabaska Trail," etc.*

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Two Western Adventurers

ALEXANDER HENRY

ALEXANDER HENRY, sometimes called "The Elder" to distinguish him from his nephew of the same name, was born in New Jersey in 1739. Practically nothing is known of his life up to the year 1760, when he accompanied Amherst's invading army into Canada, not as a soldier but as a merchant. He had obtained a quantity of goods at Albany, but had the misfortune to lose them all in the Cedars Rapids in the St. Lawrence on his way down to Montreal.

From a Frenchman who had spent many years in the West as a fur-trader he learned of the fortunes that awaited those who had the hardihood to risk the dangers and privations of the Indian country. Henry was the type of man to whom such an adventure made an irresistible appeal, and he lost no time in getting together an outfit of trading goods. Loading these in canoes, he set out from Lachine in 1761 and, by way of the Ottawa River, Lake Nipissing and French

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

River reached Georgian Bay. From there he made his way through Lake Huron to Michilimackinac, or, as it is now known, Mackinac.

To understand the recklessness of Henry's adventure it must be remembered that Canada had only just been ceded by France to England, and the western tribes among whom he was going were for the most part loyal to the French and hostile to the British. Indeed at this very time the great Indian leader, Pontiac, was planning that famous Conspiracy of which Parkman has given us such a splendid account; and Henry was to find himself in the very thick of the native uprising, and to get his fill of adventure before he won through.

For the story of his extraordinary experiences at Mackinac, as well as of his later exploits in the country west of Lake Superior, we are indebted to Henry himself who, in 1809, published his *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776*. This book

ALEXANDER HENRY



ALEXANDER HENRY, THE ELDER

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

is equally remarkable for the unusual interest of the matter it contains and for the delightful style in which it is written. Dr. Milo Milton Quaife, who edited one of the later editions of the book, says of its author: "It is evident that Henry must have received some education, but in his twenty-first year he plunged into the wilderness, not to emerge therefrom for sixteen long years. Yet in some mysterious manner he had become a master of English and this, his sole production, is literature in the best sense of the term. The shelves of our libraries are loaded down with books, dry as the desert of Sahara, whose authors have devoted their lives to the professed pursuit of learning. But here is a man whose formal education could scarcely have gone beyond the stage of the modern common school, and who for a decade and a half lived in an environment of savagery wherein his life was at no time worth an hour's purchase; yet he has written a book instinct with literary charm and artistry."

Of the famous incident at Mackinac in

ALEXANDER HENRY

1763, when the British garrison was massacred by the Indians, it is impossible to give a complete account here. All that one can attempt to do is to outline very briefly Henry's part in the story. The rest may be read in Henry's own narrative, or in Parkman's *Conspiracy of Pontiac*.

Henry, it appears, was busy writing letters when the massacre began, and so escaped for the time being. The plan of the Indians had been extremely clever. They had been apparently very friendly with the garrison for some days, and finally invited them to witness a game of lacrosse in front of the fort. Having disarmed suspicion, the Indians awaited a favourable moment, rushed through the gates of the fort, caught the little garrison unprepared and scattered, and cut them down one after another.

Henry, meantime, had escaped to the house of a French trader named Langlade, and concealed himself in the garret. Indians searched the garret soon afterwards, but failed to find him as he was hidden under a

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

pile of birch-bark. They returned the following day and were about to kill him when one of them, Wenniway, decided to adopt him in place of a lost brother. He was left in the garret for the time being, but an hour later another Indian came and ordered him to follow him to the camp. Henry suspected that the Indian, who owed him for trading goods, proposed to wipe out the debt in his own way, but he had no choice.

When they had got some way from the fort, the Indian attacked him with a knife, but Henry managed to trip him up and fled back to the fort pursued by the infuriated Indian. There he found Wenniway and besought his protection. The situation would have been humorous if it had not been so tragic, for the Indian chased Henry round and round Wenniway, slashing at him ineffectually with his knife, until the trader finally managed to find shelter once more in Langlade's house.

The following morning Henry was put in a canoe and carried prisoner to a village of the Chippewa. Before they reached their

ALEXANDER HENRY

destination, they were surprised by a party of Ottawas, who dragged Henry and his fellow-prisoners out of the canoes, and carried them back to Mackinac. Here the two tribes held a council, and by means of presents the Chippewas persuaded the Ottawas to restore the prisoners.

“The reader’s imagination,” says Henry, “is here distracted by the variety of our fortunes, and he may well paint to himself the state of mind of those who sustained them; who were the sport, or the victims, of a series of events more like dreams than realities, more like fiction than truth!” So much was this the case that at least one modern scholar has refused to accept Henry’s account of his adventures as authentic, and has put his opinion of the fur-trader into the following doggerel verse:

“Garrulous old trader, sitting with a jorum
Close beside your elbow, and tobacco blowing free,
Easy ’tis to picture you, spinning to a
quorum

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

Of pop-eyed New York burghers your tales
of deviltry!
How you must have made them palpitate
and shiver
As you warmed up to your narrative of
blood and massacre!
How you must have chortled as you saw
'em shake and quiver
To your tales of shocking escapades by trail
and lake and river—
I'm afraid you were a liar, but you knew
how to deliver
Your auditors of Gotham from the shackles
of ennui!"

Nevertheless Henry's narrative has been amply corroborated, and there can be no doubt that his account of the events at Mackinac and elsewhere were substantially correct. Parkman accepted his statements without question, and Parkman was not the kind of historian to swallow idle tales.

Of Henry's subsequent adventures at Mackinac nothing more can be said here. Suffice it to note that he finally escaped through the intervention of an Indian named

ALEXANDER HENRY

Wawatam, who had adopted him as a brother some time before, and now appeared before the council and demanded his freedom.

Henry spent some years in the Lake Superior country, and in 1775 struck out boldly with his trading outfit into the far west. He travelled by way of Grand Portage and the string of small lakes and waterways that lie along what is now the International Boundary to Rainy Lake, down Rainy River to the Lake of the Woods, and by Winnipeg River to Lake Winnipeg. Coasting up the east shore of Lake Winnipeg, Henry was overtaken by Peter Pond, "a trader of celebrity in the North-west," of whom more will be heard later, and by Joseph Frobisher and his brother Thomas, also notable fur-traders.

They reached the mouth of the Saskatchewan the beginning of October and made their way up-stream to Cumberland House, which had been built the previous year by Samuel Hearne for the Hudson's Bay Company. This was the same Hearne who made the

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

famous journey to the mouth of the Coppermine River in 1771-72. Cumberland House was now in charge of Mathew Cocking, whose journey to the Blackfeet is described in another of these Readers. The post was garrisoned by Orkneymen, and Henry and his companions, though trade rivals and unwelcome guests, were treated by Cocking with every civility.

On their way up the Saskatchewan, Henry and his party had stopped at a Cree encampment at the mouth of the Pasquia River. This was a somewhat famous spot in the history of the fur trade, La Vérendrye having built a fort there about thirty-three years before, Niverville and La Corne having been stationed there, and the place having been visited by Anthony Hendry and other British explorers and traders. It was a strategic spot, and a wily Cree chieftain named Chatique had established his headquarters there.

Henry describes Chatique as a man of striking appearance, over six feet tall, some-

ALEXANDER HENRY

what corpulent, and, as he naïvely puts it, “of a very doubtful physiognomy.” His village consisted of thirty families, lodged in conical teepees of buffalo hide stretched upon poles twelve feet in length.

On the arrival of the fur-traders Chatique came down to the shore attended by thirty warriors, all armed with bows and arrows and spears. He invited the traders to his lodge, and it was observed that he seemed particularly anxious to bestow his hospitality on those who were the owners of goods. Henry suspected some evil design, but thought it wiser to go forward than to display fear. They entered the lodge accordingly, where they were almost immediately surrounded by armed warriors.

Chatique arose with the gravity and dignity of his race. He was glad, he said, to see the white men. The young men of his village as well as himself had long been in want of many things of which he perceived the traders were possessed in abundance. He was sure they must be well aware of his

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

power to prevent their going farther; he assured them that even if they escaped now he could and would put them to death on their return; and under all the circumstances he expected them to be decidedly liberal in their "presents." To avoid any possible misunderstanding, he added that the presents must consist of three casks of gunpowder, four bags of shot and ball, two bales of tobacco, three kegs of rum, and three guns, together with knives, flints, and odds and ends for the squaws.

He went on to say that he had met white men before, and knew that they were inclined to promise more than they intended to perform; that with the number of men he had he could take all of the property of the traders without their consent, and that therefore his demands should be regarded as very reasonable. He was, he said,—and one can imagine a grim twinkle in his eye as he said it—a peaceable man, and one of moderate views. He always preferred to avoid quarrels. But, the traders must agree to his terms before they left the lodge.

ALEXANDER HENRY

What was Henry to do? He and his companions were hopelessly outnumbered; and, in any event they could not afford to make an enemy of this outrageous bandit. Chatique could cut their lines of communication at any time; and he could make endless trouble for them with the tribes above, with whom they hoped to open up trade. They were peaceful traders, and there was nothing for it but to pay tribute to this robber baron of the Saskatchewan, as the traders of long ago used to pay tribute to the robber barons of the Rhine. Nevertheless it must have been exceedingly mortifying to the white men to be held up in this way by mere Indians, and particularly exasperating to Peter Pond, whose temper was never of the best.

As soon as Chatique had been assured that the presents would be forthcoming, the ceremonial pipe was produced, lighted and handed round. The omission of this ceremony when the traders first entered the lodge had indeed, as Henry observes, been sufficient proof that Chatique's intentions were not friendly, for according to the Indian code

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

of honour nothing would be more unforgivable than treachery to a guest who had smoked the pipe of peace.

Having handed over the tribute demanded by Chatique the traders departed, but they were not even yet clear of this insatiable highwayman. They had made but a couple of miles up-stream when they saw a canoe rapidly approaching from the village. It proved to be Chatique once more. Pushing his canoe into the midst of the traders' fleet, he boarded one of the canoes spear in hand, and demanded another keg of rum, threatening to put to death the first that opposed him. "We saw," says Henry, "that the only alternative was to kill this daring robber, or to submit to his exaction. The former part would have been attended with very mischievous consequences; and we therefore curbed our indignation, and chose the latter." On receiving the rum, Chatique saluted the traders with a derisive yell, and departed. One cannot help feeling a certain reluctant admiration for this Cree chieftain. Even if

ALEXANDER HENRY

the motive was bad, it took a good deal of courage to hold up, single-handed, a party of exasperated white men.

About the beginning of January, 1776, Henry set out on a hunting and exploring trip to the western prairies. His way lay up the Saskatchewan to Fort des Prairies, on the South Saskatchewan, where he found James Finlay, the pioneer trader in this part of the west. Finlay and his men were living on the fat of the land. Buffalo roamed in countless numbers up and down the vast continental plain, extending north and south for a thousand miles or more, and the table at Fort des Prairies was loaded every day with the tongues and marrows of young buffalo. The contrast was marked to the fare at Cumberland House, where Henry and his men had narrowly escaped starvation, nothing being available but fish and not much of that.

At Fort des Prairies Henry joined a party of Assiniboine Indians, who were setting out across the plains to their winter camp. The Indians travelled swiftly on snowshoes, and

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

the trader had no little difficulty in keeping up with them. The baggage was drawn by dogs, and these with the women broke the trail in front. At night they camped in one of the clumps of trees—"bluffs," as they are now called in the West—which everywhere dot the plains. The women cleared away the snow, put up the tents, and prepared the evening meal. They feasted royally on buffalo tongues, boiled in Henry's kettle, which was the only one in the camp.

Before daylight the camp was astir, tents struck and loaded on the dog-sleds, and the whole party off again on their journey. Day after day they travelled at the same rapid pace. One morning Henry awoke to find the prairie covered with an immense herd of buffalo. It extended for a mile and a half—a dense mass, too numerous to be counted. They travelled, not one after the other, as in the snow other animals do, but in a broad phalanx, slowly, and stopping occasionally to feed on the coarse grass uncovered by their hoofs.

ALEXANDER HENRY

The following spring Henry joined the Frobishers at a new trading post they had at Frog Portage on the Churchill River, north of Cumberland House. A series of small waterways led up here from the Saskatchewan to the Churchill, and this was to be for generations one of the main routes of travel for fur-traders and explorers to the Churchill and from that stream by way of Methye Portage to the Clearwater and the Athabaska.

Henry and the Frobishers explored the Churchill from Frog Portage to Ile à la Crosse lake, where they came in contact with a party of Chipewyan Indians from the north. From these natives Henry obtained a good deal of information about the topography of their country. They told him about a river, which then bore the same name it is known by to-day—Peace River. They told him of Lake Athabaska; that it emptied itself by a river running to the northward, which they called Kiratchinini or Slave River; and that the great lake into which it flowed bore the

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

same name; all of which was strictly correct. They were not sure what lay beyond, but gave Henry the impression that the sea could not be very far away. This of course was not the case, but it remained for Alexander Mackenzie to explore routes both to the Arctic and the Pacific.

Meanwhile, Alexander Henry turned back to the civilized east, after an absence of fifteen years and two months. He had made notable journeys in the far West, and had had some extraordinary adventures. He now settled down as a merchant in Montreal, where he built up a comfortable fortune. But before doing so he went on a voyage to Europe, where he made some notable friends, among them Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, to whom he dedicated his book of travels. He crossed over to France, was introduced to the French Court, and found an interested listener in Marie Antoinette to his tales of the wild West. Henry died at Montreal in 1824, in his eighty-fifth year.

PETER POND

ALTHOUGH they were contemporaries in the Western fur trade, Peter Pond and Alexander Henry had very little in common. Henry was a kindly, clear-headed and cool-tempered gentleman, in whom the spirit of adventure was not allowed to interfere unduly with the interests of the fur trade. His journal, as has already been pointed out, reveals him as a man of education with the rare faculty of telling a story simply and effectively. Pond was neither kindly nor clear-headed nor cool-tempered; nor could he be described as a gentleman. He was essentially an adventurer, who was never so happy as when he was far beyond the uttermost bounds of civilization. The fur trade to him was only worth while because it took him into the heart of the untamed wilderness. He also left a journal, but a very different journal to that of Henry. With the possible exception of the narrative of

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

Radisson, it is the most extraordinary production in the literature of the Western fur trade. The spelling is so grotesque that the journal was at one time supposed to be a mere hoax. Nevertheless it is unusually interesting and full of information, and there is no reason to suppose that it does not contain a true description of Pond's own adventures.

This journal was found in Connecticut some years ago by one of Pond's descendants. Its fate had been that of many another precious historical manuscript. It was being used as material to light the kitchen fire, and when rescued all the portion that related to what is now Western Canada had gone up in smoke. This was peculiarly exasperating in Pond's case because he was one of the earliest British traders in Western Canada, and made some important discoveries. Had he possessed the fine courage, resourcefulness and steadfast purpose of Alexander Mackenzie he would probably have been one of the greatest of Canadian

PETER POND

explorers. Even as it was his achievements fully entitle him to a place in the history of Western discovery; but, lacking his journal, we have nothing but his maps and incidental references to him in the narratives of contemporaries on which to build up his story.

Pond was born at Milford, Connecticut, in 1740. When sixteen years of age he joined the army, against the wishes of his parents. This is how he tells of his enlistment: "It is well Known that from fifth Gineration downward we ware all waryers Ither by Sea or Land and in Dead so strong was the Pro-pensatey for the arme that I could not with stand its Temtations. One Eaveing in April the Drums an Instraments of Musick were all Imployed to that Degrea that thay Charmed me. I repaired to a Publick house whare marth and Gollatrey was Highly Going on. I found Miney lads of my Aquantans which Seamd Detarmined to Go in to the Sarvis. I talkt with Capt Baldwin and ask him weather he would take me in his Company as he was the Recruiting Offeser.

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

He Readealey agreed and I set my hand to the orders."

Pond served under General Abercromby at Ticonderoga in 1758, and gives a graphic description of the battle—when one has become accustomed to his extraordinary spelling and punctuation. He was also at the capture of Niagara, which he spells "Nagarey." After the cession of Canada he went on a voyage to the West Indies, and after spending three years at Milford, in 1764 he entered the Western fur trade.

Pond spent six years trading in the neighbourhood of Detroit. He then made another voyage to the West Indies; and in 1773 went west to Mackinac and the Mississippi. He wintered among the Sioux "on such food as thay made youse of themselves which was Verey dartelay Cooked." One season he travelled far inland to a branch of the Sioux tribe which had never before been visited by white traders. This journey took him into the great plain between the Mississippi and the Missouri. He was very well received by

PETER POND

the natives and brought back many packs of valuable furs.

Another year word came to Mackinac that war had broken out among the Sioux and the Chippewa. It would be unsafe for the traders to go into the Mississippi country until a truce could be patched up between the two tribes. Pond, whose fearlessness had already given him a great deal of influence among the Indians, volunteered to carry a wampum belt to the Sioux and persuade them to make peace with their enemies. He met a number of Sioux chiefs on St. Peter's River, a branch of the Mississippi, and brought them down to Mackinac, where they met several Chippewa chiefs and agreed to bury the hatchet, at any rate for the time being.

Pond tells of a Frenchman who had lived for years among the tribes on the Missouri, and had gained a remarkable influence over them by means of a few sleight-of-hand tricks which were beyond their comprehension. Pond witnessed one of these simple

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

tricks. As the Frenchman was standing among some people an Indian came up to them with a calumet or stone pipe which he had made himself and which he set great store by. The Frenchman wished to buy it, but the Indian would not sell. Then he took it in his hands and pretended to swallow it. The poor Indian was astonished, and he might well be as Pond says the pipe was three times larger than the Frenchman's mouth.

About 1775 Pond turned his attention to the country beyond Lake Winnipeg. His meeting with Henry in that year has already been mentioned. He wintered on Lake Winnipegosis, and spent the next two years trading in the Saskatchewan country. In 1778 he met several of the traders at Cumberland House, and from there Pond started out into the far North-west.

As far as Ile à la Crosse Lake he followed the same route that Henry and the Frobishers had explored, but from that point Pond was striking out into territory that no white man

PETER POND

had hitherto seen. Paddling up a long arm of the lake, a small river brought him to Churchill Lake; from there he entered Buffalo Lake, which has lately been named Peter Pond Lake, and ascended a shallow stream called La Loche to a lake of the same name. Here he was within a few miles of the high rocky ridge that divide the waters flowing into Hudson Bay from those that empty into the Arctic Ocean.

The thirteen-mile carrying-place which Pond now had to cross to reach the Clearwater river and the Athabaska, has been variously known as Portage La Loche or Methye Portage, and was to become famous in later years not only as the gateway to the immense water systems of the far Northwest, but as containing one of the most charming bits of scenery on the continent. Its beauty perhaps did not make any special appeal to Pond, but it certainly has not lacked admirers among those who came after him. Alexander Mackenzie, Franklin, Back, Harmon, nearly every man in fact who

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

passed this way and left any account of his journey, has been loud in praise of the beautiful valley that lies at the foot of Methye Portage. The scene, so charmingly caught by Back in one of his illustrations to Franklin's *Polar Sea*, had been described by Mackenzie many years before. The valley, he said, was about three miles in breadth, and was confined by two lofty ridges, displaying a most beautiful admixture of wood and lawn, stretching on till the blue mist obscured the view. The twin heights were covered with stately forests, broken by patches of emerald lawn on which herds of buffalo and elk were feeding. It was then September, and the whistling of the elk could be heard mingling with the song of innumerable birds and the myriad voices of the wilderness.

Descending the precipice, Pond found himself on the banks of the Clearwater. For the first time in the history of exploration in north-western America, that which had been talked of for so many years, and been the subject of so many geographical theories, was discovered—a river flowing to the westward.

PETER POND

We know from Pond's manuscript maps and other records that, like other early travellers, he had the ambition to find a waterway that would bring him to the Western Sea, the Pacific. He probably already knew from the Indians that the Clearwater could not be that stream, but it might in time bring him to a river that did empty into the ocean. In any event, it pointed in the right direction.

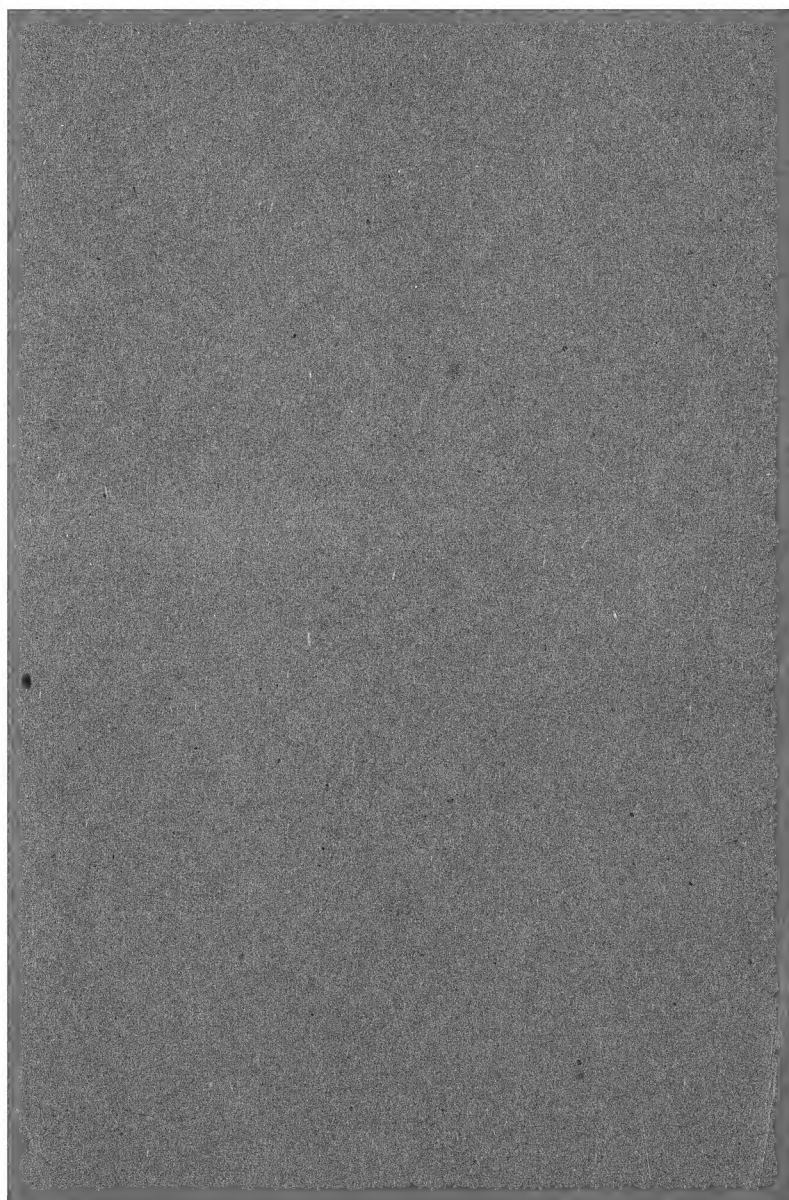
A journey of about eighty miles brought Pond to the waters of the Athabaska, continuing down which stream he at length found a spot, about thirty miles above the place where it empties into Lake Athabaska, that was admirably suited to the requirements of a trading post. Unloading his canoes he and his men set to work to build a rude fort, in which they spent the winter.

This fort Pond made his headquarters for the next six years, during which time he wandered back and forth throughout all this Western country, from the Saskatchewan to Lake Athabaska, and probably as far as Great Slave Lake and Peace River. In any event he was undoubtedly the first white man

CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

to reach the Athabaska and to stand upon the shores of Lake Athabaska.

Pond remained in the West until 1788, travelling about the country, trading with the Indians, gathering material for the maps that some years later were to be of service to the Americans in settling the international boundary, and one of which is said to have been prepared for Catherine II of Russia. One wonders why the Empress of Russia was so curious as to the then extremely remote interior of North America. Pond's morose, quarrelsome nature got him into trouble with other traders, and he is believed to have been responsible for the death of at least two of his associates. His was not a likeable character, but he added quite materially to what was known of that immense region west of Lake Superior, and his journal, if it had been preserved, would probably have given us a great deal of information as to the Western tribes at the time when white men first went among them. Pond finally returned to his birth-place, and died there in 1807.



THE RYERSON CANADIAN HISTORY READERS

1. HEROES

- 1A. *Sieur de Maisonneuve—*Lorne Pierce*
1B. *Count de Frontenac—*Helen B. Williams*
1C. *Pierre le Moine d'Iberville—*Norman McLeod Rogers*
1D. *Marquis de Montcalm—*J. C. Sutherland*
1E. *General James Wolfe—*J. C. Sutherland*
1F. Sir Guy Carleton—*A. L. Burt*
1G. *Tecumseh—*Lloyd Roberts*
1H. *Sir Isaac Brock—*T. G. Marquis*
1I. The North-West Mounted Police—*C. P. Hamilton*

2. HEROINES

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2B. *Madeleine de Verchères—*E. T. Raymond*
2C. Laura Secord
2D. Marguerite Bourgeois—*P. O. Call*
2E. Sisters of St. Boniface—*Emily P. Weaver*
2F. *The Strickland Sisters—*Blanche Hume*

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3B. *Jacques Cartier—*J. C. Sutherland*
3C. *Samuel de Champlain—*Adrian Macdonald*
3D. *Hébert: The First Canadian Farmer—*Julia Jarvis*
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3N. Sir John Franklin—*M. H. Long*
3O. *Captain Cook—*Mabel Burkholder*

- 3P. David Thompson—*M. H. Long*
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3R. Capt. George Vancouver—*H. Charlesworth*
3S. *John Jewitt: The Captive of Nootka—*Eleanor Hammond Broadus*

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5D. Sir John A. Macdonald—*George H. Locke*
5E. Sir Alexander Tilloch Galt—*John I. Hutchinson*
5F. *Lord Strathcona—*H. A. Kennedy*
5G. Sir Wilfrid Laurier—*T. G. Marquis*
5H. Sir Sandford Fleming—*Lawrence J. Burpee*
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5J. The North-West Company—*M. H. Long*
5K. *The Building of the C.P.R.—*H. A. Kennedy*
5L. James Douglas—*W. N. Sage*
5M. Robinson and Begbie—*Judge F. W. Howay*
5N. Thomas D'Arcy McGee—*Isabel Skelton*
5O. George Brown—*Chester Martin*
5P. Sir George E. Cartier
5Q. Sir Charles Tupper—*D. C. Harvey*

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6B. *Jean de Brébeuf—*Isabel Skelton*
6C. *Father Lacombe—*H. A. Kennedy*
6D. *Rev. John Black—*Lorne Pierce*
6E. *Rev. James Evans—*Lorne Pierce*
6F. *Rev. John McDougall—*Lorne Pierce*
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